Strategic Plan
2001 — 2005

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Strategic Plan 2001 — 2005

Office of the Ombudsman

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Introduction

In 1997-98 the Office of the Ombudsman developed its first Strategic Plan covering the period from 1998 — 2001. This Plan was developed through several months of effort and was tabled with the Legislature as Special Report No. 20 in March of 1998. The Plan set out a vision for the Office and provided an ambitious list of core strategies and short and long term actions to achieve the vision. The planning process also called for an on-going process to review progress and, to that end, the Office's Extended Management Team has met routinely to manage the change processes required.

Like any Strategic Plan, there comes a time when most of the objectives have been accomplished and other have become less important or redundant in relation to changes in the external environment. This is the time to engage in a new planning process to update the Strategic Plan and set out new goals and priorities for the next few years.

In July 2000, the *Budget Transparency and Accountability Act* (BTAA) mandated ministries and government organizations to develop annual performance plans that cover a three year period. Amendments to the BTAA in 2001 continued the requirement for a three year planning process and the preparation of Service Plans. These Service Plans are to be linked to the Government's Strategic Plan. As an independent Office of the Legislature, it would be inappropriate for the Office of the Ombudsman to be constrained by the strategic priorities of the government of the day. Nevertheless, the use of strategic planning as a tool to identify necessary change and to plan for and manage that change is accepted and supported by this Office.

I was appointed Ombudsman in June 1999 and was pleased to learn of the existing Strategic Plan that had been developed under the leadership of the previous Ombudsman. The planning process for this new Plan has been focused on reviewing what was accomplished from the previous Plan, identifying actions that are not yet completed but remain important, discarding actions which are no longer seen as a priority and, most importantly, identifying new actions that are important to initiate for the future.

The core strategies have for the most part been retained, however, the actions under each of the core strategies have been significantly revised to reflect the new priorities for the next few years.

Overall the focus of the Strategic Plan is still continuous quality improvement. Over the past two years, a concerted effort has been made to reduce the size of the active caseload being carried by each of the investigative staff. It is my intention to implement performance objectives for the Office, not only in the area of our investigative work but also for the administrative and support components. This will not only enable us to assess and report on our performance against stated objectives but will also give those who bring complaints to our Office an indication of what they can expect in terms of service.

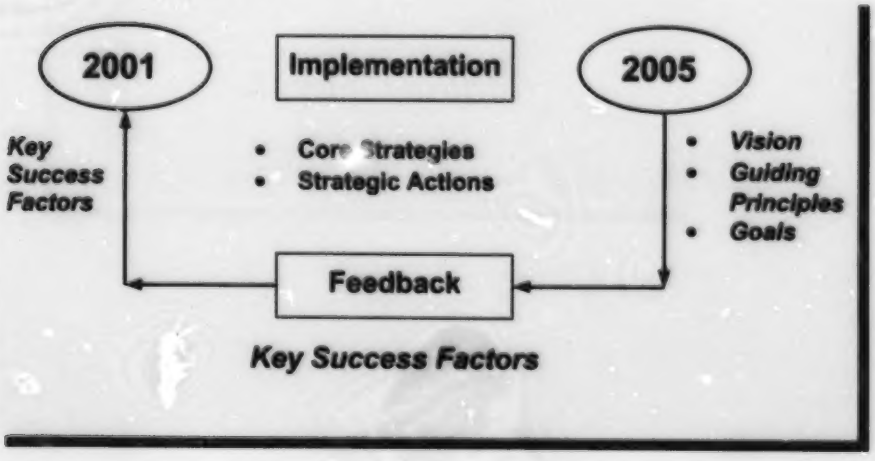
Howard Kushner
Ombudsman, Province of British Columbia

Strategic Planning Model

Our Strategic Planning model is based on four main elements:

- Describing our *VISION*
- Identifying the *KEY SUCCESS FACTORS* to monitor progress
- Assessing our *CURRENT STATE*
- Implementing *CORE STRATEGIES* and Strategic Actions

This Strategic Plan records each of these main elements. In keeping with the fact that this is the second Strategic Plan for the Office, there are many aspects that are maintained from the first Plan. Changes in the Core Strategies and Strategic Actions reflect the completion of previously identified actions and identification of new items of importance.



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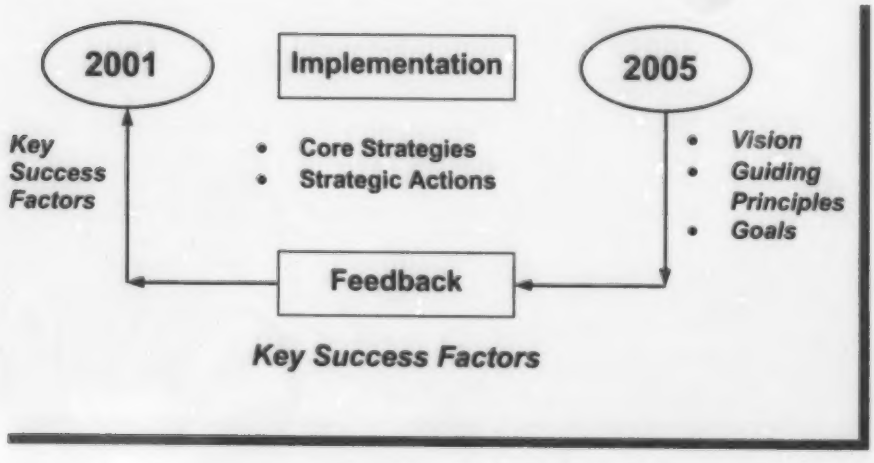

Vision

The Ombudsman is an independent Officer of the Legislature appointed pursuant to the Ombudsman Act

Informed by an understanding and appreciation of the principles, responsibilities and powers embedded in the Ombudsman Act, and driven by a commitment to justice and fair treatment of people, The Office of the Ombudsman strives for:

Fairness and Accountability in Public Administration in British Columbia

Guiding Principles

Respect

Treating everyone with courtesy, dignity and respect.

Leadership

Promoting fairness, equity, clarity, innovation and consistency.

Equality

Promoting equality, inclusion and access for all persons.

Continuous Learning

Encouraging and valuing continuous learning.

Cooperation

Using cooperation, empathy and goodwill in our work.

Teamwork

Valuing the diversity of experience and talent of people who have a unity of purpose and commitment to success.

Integrity

Being independent, impartial and honest.

Accountability

Performing our duties in a timely, responsive and responsible manner, and measuring and reporting on our work.

These guiding principles govern the way we do our work with the public, authorities and one another. The Guiding Principles are intended to be consistent with the principles of natural justice and administrative fairness, the Ombudsman Act, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and relevant international covenants, treaties and agreements.

Mandate

The mandate and function of the Office of the Ombudsman are set out in the Ombudsman Act. The Ombudsman can investigate complaints about the administrative decisions or actions of authorities. Appendix A contains the Schedule of Authorities within the Ombudsman's jurisdiction.

Why we exist

- to ensure that every member of the public is treated fairly by authorities.

Who we serve

- the public
- the Legislature of British Columbia

What we do

- respond to inquiries from the public
- conduct thorough, impartial and independent investigations of complaints
- consider possible resolution of complaints
- consult with, provide reasons and make recommendations to authorities to improve administrative practices
- promote fairness in public administration

These four goals are the long-term results we want to achieve in fulfilling the mandate of the Office.

Thorough and Impartial Investigations

We

- identify issues of administrative unfairness;
- undertake thorough and impartial investigations;
- employ an approach that identifies and addresses the underlying causes of complaints;
- attempt to resolve complaints through consultation when appropriate;
- make recommendations and issue reports that are based on sound analysis of the facts and that are consistent with our statutory mandate and the principles of natural justice and administrative fairness;
- identify causes of recurring unfairness and advise on how it can be avoided in the future;
- promote the development of skills and organizational structures to enhance investigations; and
- use technology appropriately to facilitate investigations, manage information, identify trends, and improve our reporting.

High Quality Service

We

- have put into practice, and are committed to maintaining, clear policies and procedures that are fair, comprehensive, documented and available;
- are committed to providing high-quality service and assisting the authorities we investigate to do the same;
- strive for continuous improvement in our services;
- use technology effectively to improve accessibility, communication, business practices and accountability; and
- use technology to facilitate research and training in order to acquire knowledge and develop skills.

High Morale in our Workplace

We

- provide a supportive and trusting environment that promotes open and effective communication;
- share a common purpose and participate in decision making;
- recognize the contribution of our staff;
- maximize learning and the enhancement of skills;
- provide a safe and secure workplace; and
- use technology to meet the reasonable accommodation entitlements of staff where appropriate.

Education and Public Awareness

We

- are committed to educating the public and authorities about administrative fairness and the role of the Ombudsman;
- encourage authorities to establish complaint resolution processes and to inform the public of the processes;
- inform the public about appropriate remedies to address their complaints and encourage the public to use those remedies; and
- are committed to increasing public awareness about the services of the Office of the Ombudsman.

Key Success Factors

Key Success Factors Used to measure progress towards achieving our goals	**Goals**			
Qualitative and Quantitative Measurement of:	**Thorough and Impartial Investigations**	**High Quality Service**	**High Morale in our Workplace**	**Education and Public Awareness**
The establishment and maintenance of sound policies and procedures	✓	✓		
Adherence to statutes, policies, procedures and Guiding Principles	✓	✓		
Investigative work	✓	✓		
Work load	✓	✓	✓	
Timeliness of work completion		✓	✓	
Sound analysis of issues	✓	✓		
Resolution of Complaints	✓	✓		
Recommendations and reports	✓	✓		
Satisfaction with the Ombudsman's Office, including a survey of authorities and complainants	✓	✓	✓	✓
Improvement in authority fairness, including a survey of authorities and complainants		✓		✓
Investigative issues and approaches	✓	✓		
Access to our office		✓		✓
Our professional knowledge and skills	✓	✓	✓	
Workplace morale, including a survey of our staff		✓	✓	

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Current State Assessment

To achieve our vision, it is important first to recognize the strengths, areas to improve, opportunities and challenges facing us today as an organization.

We identify our strengths as:

- the diversity, talents and commitment of our staff;
- the team structure of our Office organization;
- strong committed leadership;
- the *Ombudsman Act*;
- our computer support systems;
- safe, functional and pleasant office facilities;
- respect for the Office of the Ombudsman by authorities;
- our ability to deal with a large volume of complaints;
- a work environment that encourages positive office morale;
- the use of internal and external communication tools; and
- a commitment to maintain our strengths.

We identify the following areas for improvement:

- orientation of new staff;
- training and development opportunities for all staff;
- internal quality assurance measures;
- handling the impact of changes in staffing; and
- broadening authorities' and the public's understanding of the role of the Ombudsman

We identify our opportunities as:

- technological advances that make communication and investigations easier;
- national and international growth of Ombudsmanship that improves general knowledge of the role of the Ombudsman;
- development of internal complaint remedies by authorities that improve administrative fairness;
- collaboration with other Ombudsman offices for sharing ideas, procedures and systems;
- enhanced public profile that builds understanding of the Ombudsman's role;
- education of public and authorities that improves understanding of administrative fairness;
- continued internal learning that increases staff effectiveness and satisfaction; and
- use of a broader range of communication techniques.

We identify our challenges as:

- budget restrictions;
- changes in governmental priorities, policies and programs;
- limited awareness and understanding by the public and authorities of the Ombudsman's role;
- providing high quality service in a geographically and culturally diverse province;
- public cynicism towards public agencies and authorities;
- increasing complexity of complaints; and
- maintaining a work environment that encourages positive office morale.

Core Strategies and Actions

The Core Strategies represent our major initiatives to achieve our vision and goals. Specific actions are listed to carry out each of these core strategies. Some of the actions are carried forward from the previous Strategic Plan, if they were not completed and are still considered important, and other actions have been added to reflect the current situation.

Core Strategy 1

To broaden and enhance our understanding of Ombudsmanship and to develop and implement actions to achieve high quality service on a continuous basis.

Actions

- Establish performance objectives for investigative work and administrative and support components of the Office.
- Continue development and update of policies and procedures.
- Carry out and document review of work.
- Conduct and document regular performance reviews and prepare work plans.
- Enhance the quality and content of training:
    - assess training needs;
    - continue to design and implement a comprehensive orientation program for all staff;
    - complete development of an Investigative Skills Manual and associated training course;
    - encourage staff to identify their training needs; and
    - have legal and systems teams provide training when new systems, concepts or legal positions have been adopted by the Office.
- Encourage all individuals and teams to take responsibility in the training process through self-training, courses and development of materials.
- Continue training of all staff on issues of equality, diversity and accessibility.
- Establish and support consultation with colleagues in other Ombudsman offices.
- Develop a training package on administrative fairness and investigative skills.
- Publish a revised Code of Administrative Justice.

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Core Strategy 2

To enhance fair public administration by refining our approach to the investigation and resolution of complaints.

Actions

- Enhance our understanding of investigative techniques through research, discussion, practice, and sharing of information about investigations and approaches to them.
- Define and develop investigative approaches that identify the underlying factors that cause unfairness, in addition to a focus on the resolution of individual complaints.
- Promote improvement of skills through development of materials and provision of training.

Core Strategy 3

To manage workload in the most efficient and fair manner possible, having regard for our statutory mandate and available resources.

Actions

- Improve case load management and related case review and develop workload standards.
- Discuss and develop policy on the exercise of discretion under section 13 of the *Ombudsman Act* when determining whether or not to investigate a complaint.
- Provide time management training.
- Develop policy regarding secondment opportunities and filling temporary vacancies.
- Continue enhancement of the Case Tracker System and other computer support systems.

Core Strategy 4

To promote high morale in the workplace through effective communication and adherence to our Guiding Principles.

Actions

- Review our Employment Equity Plan.
- Encourage acknowledgement of each other's efforts.
- Provide more public, office or team recognition of employees' achievements.
- Consult with staff about the need for an internal staff grievance procedure.
- Clarify expectations about workload and performance standards.
- Encourage staff development opportunities within the Office.
- Offer variation in tasks, duties and/or responsibilities.
- Recognize existence of stress and provide support in dealing with its negative effects.
- Develop policy regarding secondment opportunities.

Core Strategy 5

To broaden the public profile and improve external understanding of the role of the Ombudsman and administrative fairness through well-planned initiatives directed towards both the public and authorities.

Actions

- Post all public reports on our website.
- Increase opportunities for citizens to meet with the Ombudsman in their local communities.
- Provide information about available remedies on our Internet website.
- Promote and support establishment of a team-focused strategy to meet with authorities, at all levels, to discuss with and inform them about the role of the Office of the Ombudsman and administrative fairness.
- Update and maintain multilingual brochures.
- Review the Office's communications strategy.

Appendix A

Schedule of Authorities

This schedule lists the authorities under the Ombudsman's jurisdiction to investigate.

1) Ministries of the government.
2) A person, corporation, commission, board or bureau or authority who is or the majority of the members of which are, or the majority of the members of the board of management or board of directors of which are,
    (a) appointed by the Act, minister, the Lieutenant Governor in Council,
    (b) in the discharge of their duties, public officers or servants of the government, or
    (c) responsible to the government.
3) A corporation the ownership of which or a majority of the shares of which is vested in the government.
4) Municipalities.
5) Regional Districts.
6) The Islands Trust established under the *Islands Trust Act.*
7) Improvement Districts as defined under the *Municipal Act.*
8) The Capital Improvement District under the *Capital Commission Act.*
9) Board, committees, commissions or similar bodies established under the *Municipal Act* or *Vancouver Charter.*
10) The Resort Municipality of Whistler and the Whistler Resort Association.
11) A local trust committee, the Trust Council, the Trust Fund Board and the executive committee and persons to whom their powers are delegated under the *Islands Trust Act.*
12) Library boards as defined under the *Library Act.*
13) Regional Parks Boards established under the *Parks (Regional) Act* and the Cultus Lake Park Board.
14) A greater board as defined in section 872 of the *Municipal Act.*
15) Development districts, water users' communities, comptroller and regional water manager under the *Water Act.*
16) The commissioners of a district defined in section 58 of the *Drainage, Ditch and Dike Act* and an engineer, commissioner, inspector of dikes or land settlement board acting under that Act.
17) The British Columbia Diking Authority and a Diking authority under the *Dike Maintenance Act.*

18) The Okanagan Kootenay Sterile Insect Release Board.

19) Regional transit commissions established under the *British Columbia Transit Act.*

20) A corporation,

(a) more than 50% of the issued voting shares of which are owned by one or more of the authorities listed in section 4 to 19 or this section, or

(b) that is controlled by one or more of the authorities listed in section 4 to 19 and, for the purposes of ascertaining control, a corporation is controlled by one or more of these authorities if a majority of the members of the corporation or its board of directors or board of management consists of either or both of the following:

1) i) persons appointed as members by the authorities;

2) ii) officers or employees of an authority acting as such.

21) Schools and boards as defined in the *School Act.*

21.1) Francophone education authorities as defined in the *School Act* and francophone schools operated by francophone education authorities.

22) Universities as defined in the *University Act.*

23) The University of Northern British Columbia.

24) Royal Roads University.

25) Institutions as defined in the *College and Institute Act.*

26) Hospitals and boards of management of hospitals as defined in the *Hospital Act.*

27) Governing bodies of professional and occupational associations that are established or continued by an Act.

28) Regional Health Boards and Community Health Councils established under the *Health Authorities Act.*

29) Regional Hospital Districts under the *Hospital District Act.*

30) Technical University of British Columbia.

31) The Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority established under the *Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority Act.*